

DRAFT Environmental Assessment

Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition



May 2018



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on this proposal to acquire a 161-acre addition to its Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (DMWMA). FWP's purpose for purchasing the land is to remove a private inholding in order to better manage DMWMA for wildlife values and recreational opportunity.

Agency authority for the proposed action: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has the authority under state law (§ 87-1-201, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future, and to acquire land for this purpose (§ 87-1-209, MCA). In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB526 which earmarked hunting license revenues to secure wildlife habitat through lease, conservation easement, or fee-title acquisition (§ 87-1-241 and 242, MCA). The Habitat Montana Program, developed as a result of this legislation, provides direction for all FWP's wildlife habitat acquisition programs.

Anticipated Schedule: Purchase is proposed to be completed by August 2018.

Location affected by proposed action: (See Maps 1 & 2 below) This property is adjacent to the southeast corner of the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), located 31 miles south-southwest of Livingston and 14 miles north-northwest of Gardiner and Yellowstone Park in FWP's Region 3 in the upper Paradise Valley in Park County, legally defined as the northeast ¼ of Section 18 in Township 7 South, Range 8 East.

Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

<u>Acres</u>	<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:	(d) Floodplain
Residential	<u>0</u>
Industrial	<u>0</u>
(existing shop area)	(e) Productive:
(b) Open Space/	Irrigated cropland
Woodlands/Recreation	Dry cropland
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	Forestry
Areas	Rangeland
	Other
	<u>0</u>

Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction:

- a) Proposed funding:
FWP (Habitat Montana and Pitman-Robertson Funds) estimated \$400,000 – \$600,000
- b) No permits required
- c) No overlapping jurisdictions

Narrative summary of the proposed action:

FWP proposes to acquire a private inholding of 161 acres as an addition to the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (DMWMA). The parcel is strategically located within an expanse of native intact habitat near the divide between Gardiner Basin and Paradise Valley adjacent to DMWMA and the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

The WMA and surrounding area supports elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, black and grizzly bears, wolves, mountain lions, antelope, a suite of nongame wildlife, and provides abundant opportunity for

hunting and recreation. This parcel would be incorporated into the WMA and managed for the same objectives of wildlife, conservation, and public opportunity.

The parcel was retained as a private inholding that also includes a yearlong travel easement through DMWMA to the parcel, both negotiated as terms when the property was purchased to establish the Wildlife Management Area. A purchase option and right of first refusal was assigned from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to FWP in 1990 allowing the department to purchase the inholding at 32% of today's appraised value. The Conservation Fund has partnered with FWP to assist with this acquisition; it will purchase and hold the parcel to meet the time-line for the Right of First Refusal thereby allowing FWP sufficient time to conduct public process.

This property includes grassland/shrub-grassland habitat and Douglas fir forest with a stream, riparian area, and aspen. The area lies within important bull wintering range and is near an important migratory corridor. It is used by mixed groups of elk occasionally through winter and more heavily as they stage and begin their spring migration. The area is occupied by grizzly bears and represents important habitat for dispersal and connectivity for grizzlies as well as other widely ranging wildlife species. It contains a mix of several priority habitats and is connected to larger expanses of these habitats on adjacent public lands. This parcel would be a small but important addition to an expanse of native habitat that is conserved as public land and provides connectivity between Yellowstone Park and areas to the north in Montana.

Hunting and fishing opportunities are abundant on the DMWMA with significant opportunity for elk hunting as a minimum of 2,500-3,000 elk migrate into the area each fall. There is also hunting opportunity for mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, wolves, black bear, and mountain lion. Other recreational opportunities include hiking, horse-back riding, wildlife watching, photography, and bird-watching. Acquisition of this parcel would enhance the existing opportunity and provide better connectivity between the DMWMA and USFS lands. If acquired and added to the current Dome Mountain WMA, the property would be open for public hunting and recreation except for seasonal closures to protect elk winter range December 1 – May 15.

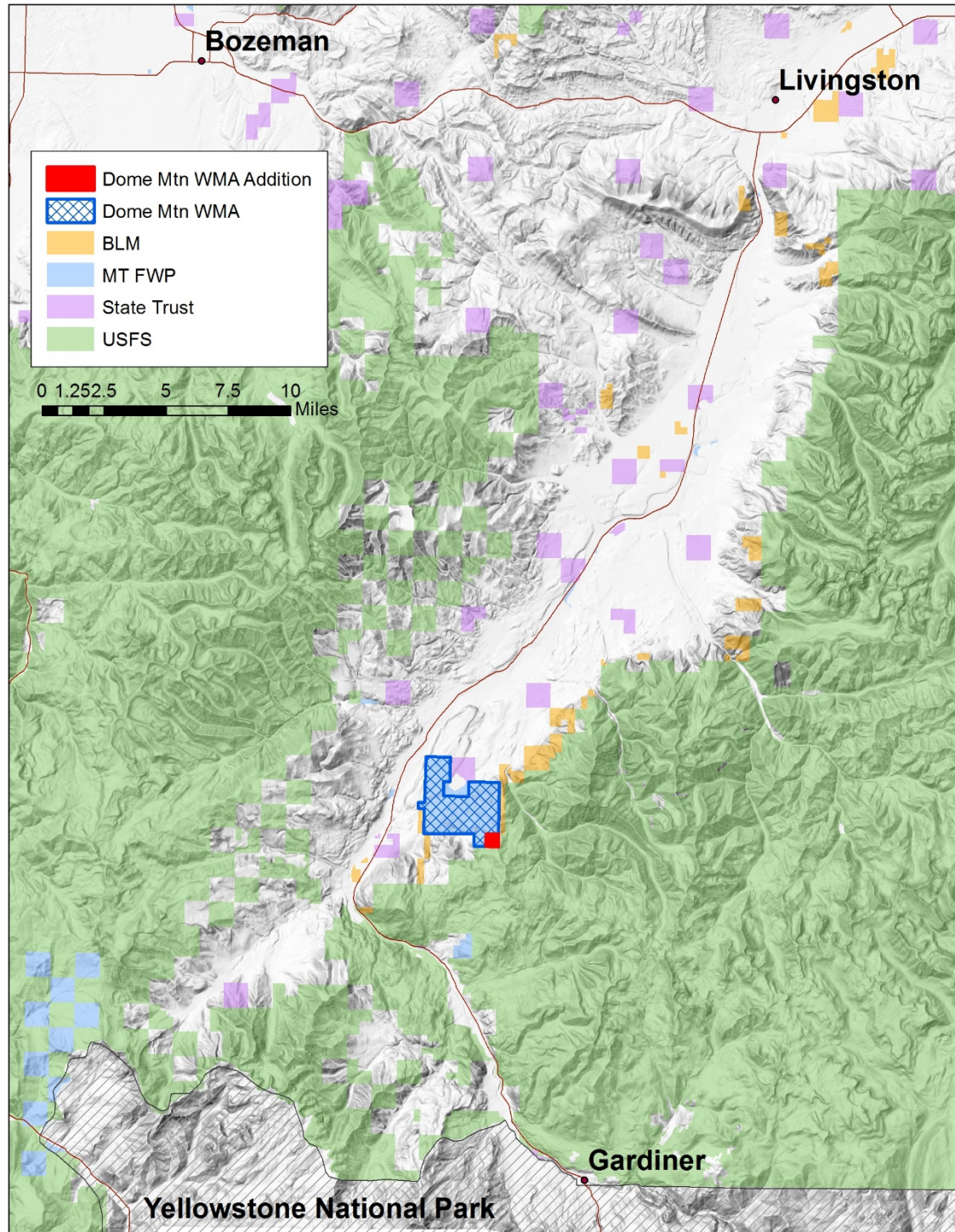
If FWP does not acquire the parcel, it will likely be subject to disturbance from a future private owner. FWP holds a conservation easement on the parcel that would restrict the extent of development that could occur on the parcel, however a future owner would be free to engage in a variety of activities that could result in disturbance to wildlife and deterioration of habitat. The future of this inholding and the associated travel easement has the potential to directly impact habitat integrity and recreational values of DMWMA. Acquiring this land as an addition to the WMA would ensure protection of the department's existing landholding interests.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

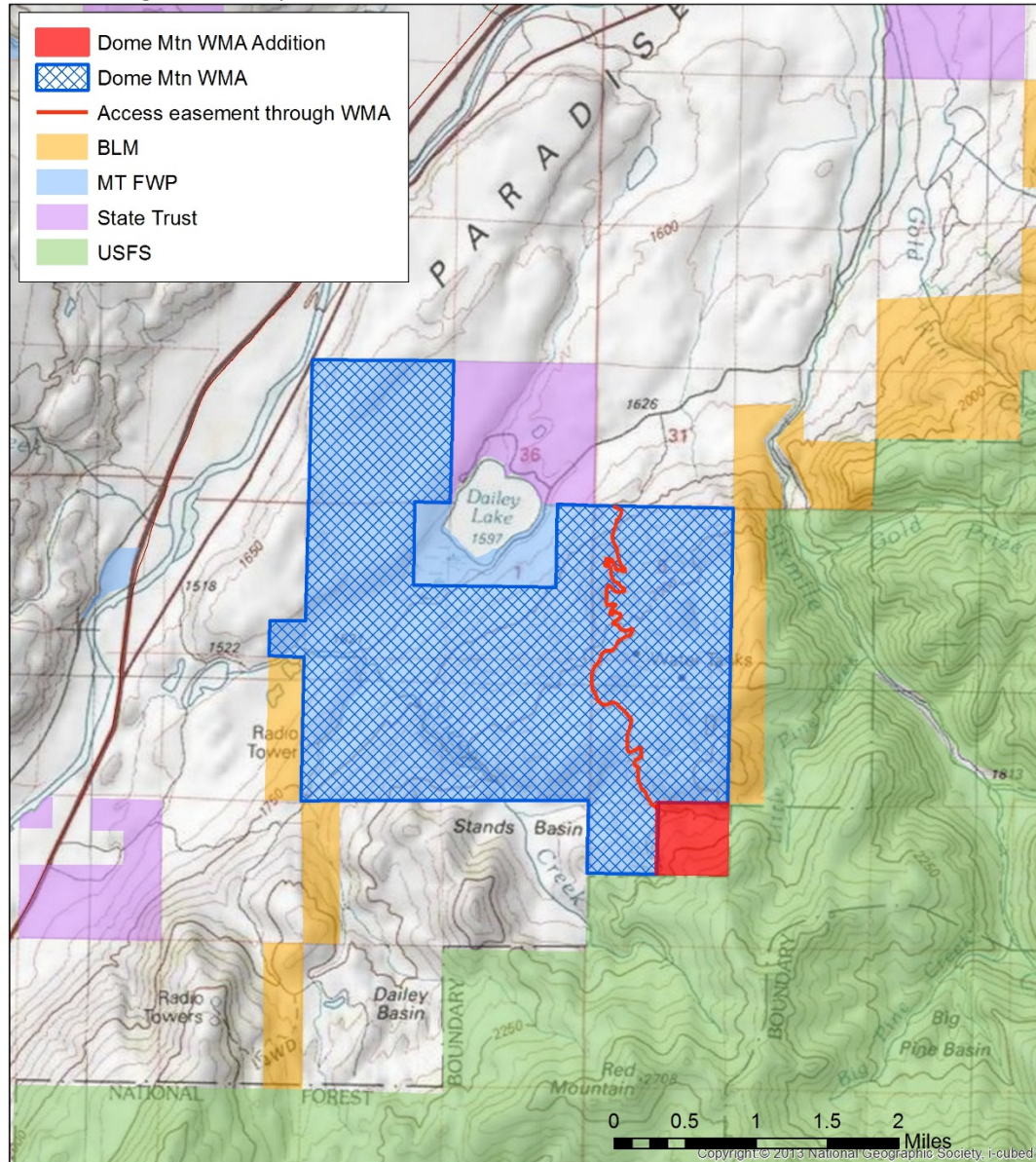
Alternative A: No Action: The proposed land acquisition would not occur and no change would be made to the boundaries of the Dome Mountain WMA.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: FWP would purchase (fee title) 161 acres as an addition to the Dome Mountain WMA and the property would be managed for wildlife, conservation, and public recreation.

Map 1. General location of Dome Mountain WMA and proposed WMA Addition



Map 2. Dome Mountain WMA and proposed WMA Addition and surrounding public land ownership. Access easement through WMA to parcel is shown.



PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)		X				

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X			1
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				2
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

1. The proposed action is expected to have a positive impact on existing native vegetation under FWP management with treatment of noxious weed infestations. Additionally, FWP will assess need for riparian habitat enhancement projects, and management of forest to support forest health and wildlife values.
2. Noxious weeds are already established in this area, especially adjacent to roads. A weed inspection survey will be conducted on the property prior to or shortly after acquisition, and FWP will treat weeds using chemical, mechanical or biological methods. Habitat improvement is expected with consistent weed treatments.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				3
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			4
h. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				

3. The proposed acquisition would have a positive impact by maintaining/improving habitat integrity on the parcel and expanding protection of habitat.
4. With the addition of this parcel to the WMA, the land will be open to public recreation and hunting May 15 – Nov 30. This increased opportunity will likely result in harvest within the legally defined hunting seasons as well as disturbance to wildlife due to other recreational activities. Very limited public access has been allowed on this parcel in recent years, so public access to the parcel associated with this acquisition would represent an increase in disturbance during the May 15 – Nov 20 time period, however the acquisition would result in reduced disturbance during critical winter months that would adversely impact wildlife. The WMA is closed to all public activities from December 1 until May 15 to protect wintering elk.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				5
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

5. The proposed acquisition would not increase noise above levels currently experienced in the area. Public access to the property would be walk-in only.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				6
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

6. The property is not currently managed for any specific land use. FWP would manage the property for the benefit of fish and wildlife species while providing opportunities for public recreation with the potential to improve the productivity of the area by weed treatment and possible habitat projects.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		X	7
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X		X	7

7. If acquired, FWP would implement management of existing or new noxious weeds on the parcel and adjacent areas. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines and conducted by people trained in safe application techniques.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				8
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			X			9
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources*		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.*			X			10

8. The proposed action will likely reduce public service needs as there will no longer be a private residence in a very remote location. FWP will be responsible for maintaining the property, and FWP enforcement staff will include the acquired parcel in their routine patrols of the DMWMA.
9. This purchase is not expected to reduce the tax revenues that Park County collects on this property. FWP is required by Montana Code 87-1-603 to pay "to the county a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen." The most recent taxes for 2017 on this property was \$528.00 per year based on the most recent assessment.
10. Maintenance costs will include weed treatment and fence maintenance, which will be done alongside routine weed and fence maintenance on the WMA. The addition would represent a 3.4% increase in the size of the WMA; the additional staff time required to treat weeds and maintain fences on this parcel is expected to be negligible. Additionally, the historic cabin will remain on the premises and will require minor annual upkeep. Upon acquisition, some initial investment will be made to clean up and restore the vicinity of the home site. Initial and ongoing costs to maintain the property would be absorbed within the DMWMA operating budget.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X			11
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		n/a				

11. The acquisition will result in an increase in public access and recreational opportunity by expanding the number of acres available to hunters and other public recreationalists for non-motorized recreation, and with improved connectivity between DMWMA and adjacent Forest Service lands.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				12

12. The cabin was built 70 years ago and is therefore considered a cultural property. FWP intends to maintain the historic cabin consistent with State Historic Preservation Office recommendations.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				13
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13. The proposed acquisition is expected to have no significant cumulative effects. By acquiring the parcel and incorporating it into the DMWMA, FWP expects to improve the integrity of the DMWMA as well as protect the habitat values of the parcel itself.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

No significant impacts were identified in the Environmental Analysis. Identified minor impacts were:

- 1) Increased disturbance to wildlife on the parcel due to increased public access. This impact is will be mitigated by decreased disturbance during critical winter months when the WMA is closed to the public (Dec 1 – May 15).
- 2) Use of chemicals to treat noxious weeds. This potential impact is mitigated by following application guidelines and utilizing staff or contractors trained in safe application techniques. This minor potential impact is also offset by the benefit to habitat in reducing/eliminating noxious weeds.

The proposed acquisition would result in the parcel and adjacent larger landscape being managed consistently for wildlife and public recreation with high potential for positive impacts for wildlife, habitat, and public opportunity. If FWP does not acquire the parcel, it will likely be subject to unknown disturbance from a future private owner. FWP holds a conservation easement on the parcel that would restrict the extent of development that could occur on the parcel, however a future owner would be free to engage in a variety of activities that could result in disturbance to wildlife and deterioration of habitat. If the proposed acquisition does not occur, the proposed expanded protection and conservation of the parcel will not occur, and likewise the opportunity to improve the overall habitat effectiveness of the DMWMA will be lost.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices, one in the Livingston Enterprise and one in the Bozeman Chronicle
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) days following publication on FWP's website. Comments will be accepted until Sunday June 3, 2018 at 5pm by mail or email at the addresses listed below (Part V, 2).

PART V. EA PREPARATION

**1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? NO
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

The proposed action will not have a significant adverse impact on the local environment; it represents a small addition (161 acres) to an existing and much larger (4,800 acres) habitat conservation area that has proven beneficial for wildlife habitat and agriculture for the past 29 years. This EA is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action.

2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

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3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Division